

STEPHANIE YONEKURA  
Acting United States Attorney  
ROBERT E. DUGDALE  
Assistant United States Attorney  
Chief, Criminal Division  
KIMBERLY D. JAIMEZ (Cal. Bar No. 271235)  
EDDIE A. JAUREGUI (Cal. Bar No. 297986)  
Assistant United States Attorney  
General Crimes Section  
1400 United States Courthouse  
312 North Spring Street  
Los Angeles, California 90012  
Telephone: (213) 894-3779  
Facsimile: (213) 894-0142  
E-mail: kimberly.jaimez@usdoj.gov

Attorneys for Plaintiff  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

FOR THE CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Plaintiff,

v.

TEOFIL BRANK,  
aka "Jarec Wentworth,"  
aka "@JarecWentworth,"

Defendant.

CR No. 15-131(A)-JFW

GOVERNMENT'S OPPOSITION TO  
DEFENDANT'S MOTION TO  
DISMISS COUNTS TWO AND FIVE  
OF THE FIRST SUPERSEDING  
INDICTMENT

Hearing Date: June 26, 2015

Hearing Time: 9:00 a.m.

Location: Courtroom of the  
Hon. John F. Walter

Plaintiff United States of America, by and through its counsel  
of record, the United States Attorney for the Central District of  
California and Assistant United States Attorneys Kimberly D. Jaimez  
and Eddie A. Jauregui, hereby files its opposition to Defendant's  
Motion to Dismiss Counts Two and Five of the First Superseding  
Indictment (Dkt. 195).

1        This Opposition is based upon the attached memorandum of points  
2 and authorities, the files and records in this case, and such further  
3 evidence and argument as the Court may permit.

4 Dated: June 25, 2015

Respectfully submitted,

5                    STEPHANIE YONEKURA  
6                    Acting United States Attorney

7                    ROBERT E. DUGDALE  
8                    Assistant United States Attorney  
9                    Chief, Criminal Division

9                    /s/

10                    \_\_\_\_\_  
11                    KIMBERLY D. JAIMEZ  
12                    EDDIE A. JAUREGUI  
13                    Assistant United States Attorneys

14                    Attorneys for Plaintiff  
15                    UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
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1        Second, the Hobbs Act, by its plain statutory language, pertains  
2 to extortion based on the "wrongful use" of "fear" to obtain property  
3 and leaves open the cause of fear so that it could include fear  
4 prompted by threats of reputational harm, threats of economic harm,  
5 or any combination of these. 18 U.S.C. § 1951(b)(2). Indeed, the  
6 traditional definition and understanding of extortion includes  
7 threats to one's reputation in the community, and particularly  
8 threats to expose embarrassing sexual indiscretions. Defendant's  
9 claims that his activity should only be considered "extortion" under  
10 18 U.S.C. § 875(d) but not under the Hobbs Act is a fictional  
11 interpretation. If defendant's conduct is extortion under § 875(d),  
12 then it is also extortion under Hobbs Act because the predecessor  
13 statutes of each were considered by the same Congress and  
14 "extortion" means the same thing in each statute.

15        Third, the Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit has already  
16 upheld a conviction under the Hobbs Act in circumstances similar to  
17 this case wherein a defendant threatened to disclose "embarrassing"  
18 information about an extramarital affair to a victim's employer.  
19 United States v. Pascucci, 943 F.2d 1032, 1033-34, 1036-37 (9th Cir.  
20 1991). Defendant's attempts to distinguish this controlling case are  
21 disingenuous. The "wrongful use of fear" in Pascucci related to the  
22 threatened disclosure of "embarrassing" material. The Pascucci court  
23 did not discuss threatened economic harm or job loss as an element of  
24 the threat. Here, the Victim's reputation was threatened: this is  
25 sufficient to meet the statutory test under the Hobbs Act. While  
26 that threatened reputational harm also encompassed economic harm (as  
27 it would have affected the Victim's business reputation as well),  
28 economic harm specifically is not a requirement under the Hobbs Act.

1 For all the foregoing reasons, the motion should be denied and  
2 the jury should be permitted to consider Counts Two and Five.

3 **II. STATEMENT OF FACTS**

4 On or about March 3, 2015, the Victim of the extortion scheme  
5 met with the FBI to report defendant's previous and continued  
6 extortion attempts threatening Victim's reputation via text message  
7 communications. Specifically, the Victim explained to the FBI that  
8 defendant was threatening to expose the "pay-for-sex" arrangement  
9 between defendant and Victim on defendant's Twitter account. The  
10 Victim had extracted the text messages from his phone and provided  
11 them to the FBI. Some of the relevant text messages sent from  
12 defendant's phone to Victim's phone included the following:

- 13 - "Be wise on How you reply. I can bring your house down  
14 [Victim]"
- 15 - "I do have a twitter and your photos. Lies can be made or  
16 Maybe it's the truth"
- 17 - "Check my twitter, the conversation will grown [sic] and  
18 questions will be asked. You lied to me and treated me like  
19 Shit. I asked again and you put it behind you. Now it's  
20 biting your ass"
- 21 - "I can't get friendship anymore, because who will want to  
22 be friends with black mail . . . Money won't wash away What  
23 people will read and see of you. Wow I guess I hold the  
24 cards right now"

25 On May 1, 2015, defendant was charged in a seven-count first  
26 superseding indictment ("FSI") with transmitting threatening  
27 communications with intent to extort, in violation of 18 U.S.C.  
28 § 875(d); extortion and attempted extortion affecting interstate



1 commerce, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1951(a); receiving proceeds of  
2 extortion, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 880; use of an interstate  
3 facility to facilitate an unlawful activity, in violation of 18  
4 U.S.C. § 1952(a)(3); and possession of a firearm in furtherance of a  
5 crime of violence, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 924(c)(1)(A)(i).

6 **Count One.** Count One of the FSI included the count from the  
7 initial indictment in this case, which initially only charged 18  
8 U.S.C. 875(d) (Transmitting Threatening Communications with Intent to  
9 Extort). Count One in the FSI alleges reputational harm.  
10 Specifically, Count One alleges that defendant transmitted in  
11 interstate commerce a threat to injure the reputation of the Victim  
12 "with the intent to extort money" when defendant "threatened to  
13 distribute sensitive information about victim D.B. on social media,  
14 if victim D.B. refused to transfer money." (Dkt. 93, pp. 1-2).

15 **Count Two.** Count Two of the FSI charges defendant with  
16 extortion in violation of the Hobbs Act. It alleges that on or about  
17 February 17, 2015, defendant "knowingly and with the intent to obtain  
18 property, obstructed, delayed, and affected commerce and the movement  
19 of articles and commodities in commerce, by extortion." (Id. at,  
20 p.3). The Count specifically references the Hobbs Act for the  
21 applicable definition of "extortion." Count Two further alleges that  
22 defendant obtained at least \$500,000 from the Victim, with consent,  
23 induced by the "wrongful use of fear." (Id.) The Count specifies  
24 that the "wrongful use of fear" in this matter was defendant's threat  
25 "to distribute sensitive information about victim D.B. on social  
26 media" if the Victim refused to transfer money and other property to  
27 defendant.

1       **Count Five.** Similarly, Count Five is a new count that alleges a  
2 Hobbs Act violation, but for attempted extortion. (Id., p.6). Count  
3 Five alleges that defendant "attempted to obstruct, delay, and affect  
4 commerce and the movement of articles and commodities in commerce by  
5 extortion" in that defendant attempted to obtain at least \$1,000,000  
6 from the Victim, with the Victim's consent, induced by the "wrongful  
7 use" of fear. (Id.) The Count specifies that the "wrongful use fear"  
8 was again the threat "to distribute sensitive information about  
9 victim D.B. on social media" if the Victim failed to comply. (Id.)

10       On June 19, 2015, defendant filed the Motion to Dismiss Counts  
11 Two and Five (Dkt. 195) ("motion" or "Mot.") claiming that Counts Two  
12 and Five are not cognizable offenses under the Hobbs Act. (Mot., 2.)

### 13 **III. ARGUMENT**

14       Defendant contends that Counts Two and Five should be dismissed  
15 because "[t]here is no allegation in these two counts that  
16 [defendant] wrongfully used fear by threatening violence against a  
17 person or property, or that he used fear by threatening economic  
18 harm." (Id.) Defendant's claim is meritless as it not only misstates  
19 the law, but it also adds unnecessary elements into the Hobbs Act  
20 charges. Neither the statute, the Ninth Circuit Jury Instructions,  
21 nor any case requires economic harm as element to extortion under the  
22 Hobbs Act. The FSI contains properly and sufficiently alleged  
23 charges.

#### 24 **A. Legal Standard for Dismissal of an Indictment**

25       The Sixth Amendment guarantees a criminal defendant the  
26 fundamental right to be informed of the "nature and cause of the  
27 charges made against him so as to permit adequate preparation of a  
28 defense." See U.S. Const. Amend. VI; Gaultt v. Lewis, 489 F.3d 993,

1 1002 (9th Cir. 2007). An indictment is deemed sufficient if it  
 2 (1) contains the elements of the offense charged; (2) fairly informs  
 3 a defendant of the charge against which he must defend; and  
 4 (3) enables him to plead an acquittal or conviction as a bar to  
 5 future prosecutions for the same conduct. United States v. Chenaar,  
 6 552 F.2d 294, 301 (9th Cir. 1977) (citing Hamling v. United States,  
 7 418 U.S. 87, 117 (1974)). Generally, an indictment that tracks the  
 8 statutory language suffices, and survives a motion to dismiss as long  
 9 as "those words of themselves fully, directly, and expressly, without  
 10 any uncertainty or ambiguity, set forth all the elements necessary to  
 11 constitute the offense intended to be punished." Id.; see also Fed.  
 12 R. Crim. P. 7(c) (requiring that indictment be "a plain, concise and  
 13 definite written statement of the essential facts constituting the  
 14 offense charged"); United States v. Rodriguez, 360 F.3d 949, 958 (9th  
 15 Cir. 2004) (holding that the statutory language "may be used in the  
 16 general description of the offense" if accompanied by a statement of  
 17 facts that informs defendant of "specific offense with which he is  
 18 charged." ).

19 Counts Two and Five are sufficient because they comply with Rule  
 20 7(c) and meet the standards noted above by tracking the statutory  
 21 language.

22 **B. Extortion by Non-Violent Threat Does Include Threats to**  
 23 **Reputation**

24 Here, the statutory language of the Hobbs Act, in relevant part,  
 25 prohibits extortion generally in stating:

26 "Whoever in any way or degree obstructs, delays, or affects  
 27 commerce or the movement of any article or commodity in  
 28 commerce, by robbery or extortion or attempts or conspires  
 so to do . . . shall be fined under this title or  
 imprisoned not more than twenty years, or both.

1 18 U.S.C. § 1951(a).

2 The Hobbs Act defines "extortion" in subsection (b)(2) as the  
3 "obtaining of property from another, with his consent, induced by  
4 wrongful use of actual or threatened force, violence, fear, or under  
5 color of official right." 18 U.S.C. § 1951(b)(2). The statute does  
6 not limit how courts should interpret "fear." See United States v.  
7 Abelis, 146 F.3d 73, 83 (2d Cir. 1998) (holding that presence of  
8 infamous individual in negotiations could be cause of fear because  
9 "statute does not limit the definition of extortion . . . but instead  
10 leaves open the cause of fear"); United States v. Middlemiss, 217  
11 F.3d 112, 118 (2d Cir. 2000) (holding that Hobbs Act does not define  
12 required cause of victim's fear).

13 The purpose of statutory interpretation "is to discern the  
14 intent of Congress in enacting a particular statute." United States  
15 v. Shill, 740 F.3d 1347, 1351 (9th Cir. 2014). "[A]nalysis must  
16 begin with the language of the statute itself; when the statute is  
17 clear, 'judicial inquiry into [its] meaning, in all but the most  
18 extraordinary circumstance, is finished.'" United States v. Carter,  
19 421 F.3d 909, 911 (9th Cir.2005). Unless otherwise defined, "words  
20 will be interpreted as taking their ordinary, contemporary, common  
21 meaning." Id. (quoting Perrin v. United States, 444 U.S. 37, 42  
22 (1979)).

23 1. The Statutory Language Encompasses Threats to  
24 Reputation

25 The type of extortion alleged in Counts Two and Five exemplifies  
26 the traditional type of extortion lawmakers have criminalized for  
27 years, which includes extortion by non-violent threats beyond mere  
28 threat of economic harm. The Supreme Court has instructed courts to

1 accept the "traditional understanding" of a term in the absence of  
2 contrary direction from Congress:

3 [W]here Congress borrows terms of art in which are  
4 accumulated the legal tradition and meaning of centuries of  
5 practice, it presumably knows and adopts the cluster of  
6 ideas that were attached to each borrowed word in the body  
7 of learning from which it was taken and the meaning its use  
will convey to the judicial mind unless otherwise  
instructed. In such case, absence of contrary direction may  
be taken as satisfaction with widely accepted definitions,  
not as a departure from them.

8 Morrisette v. United States, 342 U.S. 246, 263 (1952). Courts  
9 examining the legislative history from the Hobbs Act have noted that  
10 the extortion definition in Hobbs Act reflects the generally accepted  
11 of generic definition of extortion that existed at the time of  
12 enactment. United States v. Jackson, 180 F.3d 55 (1999). Courts and  
13 commentators alike have noted that the Hobbs Act and its predecessor,  
14 the Anti-Racketeering Act of 1934, 18 U.S.C. §§ 420a-420e, were  
15 modeled after New York law regarding extortion. Id.; United States  
16 v. Cortes, 757 F.3d 850, 865 (9th Cir. 2014) ("Congress modeled the  
17 Hobbs Act after the New York Penal Code . . . ."); James Lindgren,  
18 The Elusive Distinction Between Bribery and Extortion: From the  
19 Common Law to the Hobbs Act, 35 UCLA L. Rev. 815, 834 (1988)  
20 (hereinafter, "Bribery & Extortion.") Importantly, the New York  
21 Penal Code of 1881 explained that "fear, such as will constitute  
22 extortion, may be induced by a threat to accuse . . . of any crime .  
23 . . or to expose any secret . . . ." Bribery & Extortion, at 834; see  
24 N.Y. Penal Code, § 553 (1881). Thus, to the extent the Hobbs Act was  
25 based on New York law, the New York law interpreting "fear" should  
26 inform this Court's analysis in the Hobbs Act context. Clearly,  
27  
28

1 threats to accuse a victim of a crime or expose a secret fall within  
2 the concept of extortion-related-fear.<sup>1</sup>

3 Congress intended extortion to mean the same thing in  
4 18 U.S.C. § 875 as it does in the Hobbs Act, and § 875(d) clearly  
5 encompasses threats to reputation. See Jackson, 180 F.3d at 70  
6 ("Given Congress's contemporaneous consideration of the predecessors  
7 of § 875(d) and the Hobbs Act, both of which focused on extortion, we  
8 infer that Congress's concept of extortion was the same with respect  
9 to both statutes."). As such, the Supreme Court has expressly  
10 rejected narrow readings of the term "extortion" and has embraced  
11 expansive views encompassing extortion based on threats to expose  
12 embarrassing information of a sexual nature that could harm  
13 reputation. See United States v. Nardello, 393 U.S. 286 (1969) (in  
14 considering the Travel Act, holding that threats to expose alleged  
15 "homosexual" conduct unless victims paid for "silence" generally  
16 qualified as extortionate activity as the term is commonly  
17 understood).<sup>2</sup>

18 Notwithstanding the above, defendant has argued that this Court  
19 should constrain "wrongful use of fear" in Hobbs Act extortion to  
20 threats of physical harm or economic harm without citing any  
21 authority. (Mot., 2.) Defendant's argument should be rejected because  
22 it misreads the plain statutory language. "Extortion" traditionally  
23 encompasses threats of reputational harm. With this history, the  
24 Court can easily interpret Hobbs Act extortion and its reference to

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25  
26 <sup>1</sup> Notably, like New York law, California Penal Code § 519 also  
27 considers threats to expose a secret as a form of extortion when used  
28 to induce a victim to part with property.

<sup>2</sup> Nardello considered the Hobbs Act definition of extortion in  
its reasoning. Id. 393 U.S. at 290.

1 fear as expansively as the plain language allows and case law  
2 traditionally supports.<sup>3</sup>

3 In the instant matter, Counts Two and Five track the statute  
4 almost exactly. Counts Two and Five note that the interstate nexus  
5 language and the fact that defendant obtained, and attempted to  
6 obtain, property with the Victim's "consent, induced by wrongful use  
7 of fear." The Counts state that defendant acted with intent to obtain  
8 the property in question. Also, each Count provides a brief  
9 statement of facts to put defendant on notice of the relevant offense  
10 conduct by specifying the how defendant wrongfully used fear, i.e.,  
11 "by threatening to distribute sensitive information about victim D.B.  
12 on social media, if victim D.B. refused to transfer money, a  
13 motorcycle, and the title to victim D.B.'s automobile." This  
14 language tracks the statute and covers the elements.

15 2. The Elements Pursuant to Criminal Jury Instruction  
16 No. 8.142A Allow For Reputational Harm

17 As charged, Counts Two and Five are also consistent with the  
18 recognized elements of extortion. The "elements" of the charged  
19 Hobbs Act violations, as provided in the Ninth Circuit Jury  
20 instructions for extortion by non-violent threat, are as follows: (1)  
21 defendant induced, or intended to induce, victim to part with  
22 property by wrongful threat of economic harm or some specified other  
23 nonviolent harm; (2) defendant acted with the intent to obtain  
24 property; (3) commerce from one state to another was, or would have

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25 <sup>3</sup> An unnatural narrowing of the terms "extortion" and "fear" is  
26 not supported by the so-called "rule of lenity." The rule of lenity  
27 does not apply because the Hobbs Act statute is not ambiguous, but  
28 clearly states that wrongful use of fear to obtain property is  
generally extortion, and unlawful. The fact that reputational harm  
may not be commonly charged in the context of the Hobbs Act does not  
make the statute itself ambiguous.

1 been affected in some way; and (4) defendant did something that was a  
2 substantial step toward committing the crime (applicable to attempted  
3 extortion only). See Ninth Circuit Model Criminal Jury Instruction  
4 No. 8.142A (2010 ed.) (emphasis added).

5 Notably, neither the statutory language nor the elements listed  
6 above require that extortion by non-violent threat be induced through  
7 only threats of economic harm. To the contrary, the Ninth Circuit  
8 Jury Instruction requires any other "non-violent" harm used for  
9 extortion beyond "economic harm" to be specifically described. See  
10 Ninth Circuit Jury Instruction No. 8.142A. Defendant has alleged  
11 this false requirement that Hobbs Act extortion, based on non-violent  
12 threat, can only relate to threats of economic harm. The statute  
13 does not support this argument, and the Ninth Circuit jury  
14 instructions actually refute the argument.

15 Defendant has failed to cite any case indicating that  
16 reputational harm somehow fails as a specific non-violent harm within  
17 the meaning of the Hobbs Act or the Ninth Circuit Jury Instructions.  
18 Defendant has not alleged that the Counts fail to inform him of the  
19 charges or prevent him from creating a defense.

20 Thus, Counts Two and Five comply with Rule 7(c) and should be  
21 deemed sufficient under the Supreme Court's test for evaluating  
22 challenged indictments. Hamling, 418 U.S. at 117.

23 **C. Case Law Supports Hobbs Act Counts In Ninth Circuit &**  
24 **Elsewhere**

25 Finally, and most importantly, case law in the Ninth Circuit and  
26 elsewhere supports charging a Hobbs Act violation when extortion is  
27 based on threats to disclose embarrassing information. In United  
28 States v. Pascucci, the Ninth Circuit affirmed a conviction of a



1 defendant under 18 U.S.C. §§ 875(d) and the Hobbs Act for  
2 reputational extortion threats on similar facts as these. 943 F.2d  
3 1032, 1035-36 (9th Cir. 1991). In Pascucci, the defendant threatened  
4 to disclose evidence of an extramarital affair to the victim's wife  
5 and employer if the victim did not pay defendant several thousand  
6 dollars. Id. at 1035-36. As is the case here, the threat to the  
7 victim's reputation via disclosure of a sexual secret formed the  
8 basis of the extortion charges in Pascucci. Id. In upholding the  
9 Hobbs Act convictions, the Court said nothing of threatened "economic  
10 harm," but instead characterized the case as involving a "credible  
11 threat to deliver embarrassing materials" to the victim's employer,  
12 Ford Motor Company. Id. While Pascucci discussed the victim's  
13 employer in the decision it was only done in the context of  
14 considering the weight of interstate nexus because the employer was  
15 involved in interstate commerce. Id. Nowhere in the Pascucci case  
16 does it say that defendant threatened to get the victim fired by  
17 exposing this embarrassing information. And nowhere in the opinion  
18 does it mention that the Ford Motor Company had ever fired anyone for  
19 an extramarital affair. Id. at 1040. While damage to one's  
20 reputation can always lead to economic harm, that was not the basis  
21 for the Pascucci decision. Defendant mischaracterizes Pascucci in  
22 claiming that it relates only to threatened economic harm.  
23 Reputational harm was at issue in Pascucci, which is why defendant  
24 was convicted under both §§ 875(d) and the Hobbs Act, which are  
25 similarly charged in the case. In Pascucci, the threat was to reveal  
26 embarrassing information just as defendant here threatened to do.  
27 The Victim here faced economic repercussions (just as the Pascucci  
28 victim did), but that was not form of the actual threat.

1        United States v. Jackson is another case involving threats to  
2 reputational harm and a Hobbs Act violation. In Jackson, the Second  
3 Circuit found that evidence would have supported a Hobbs Act  
4 violation where defendant threatened to disclose Bill Cosby's sexual  
5 indiscretion of having a child out of wedlock to a tabloid newspaper.  
6 Such a threat, while certainly loaded with potential for economic  
7 harm, focused primarily on ruining Cosby's reputation as a father  
8 figure on television. The threat again fixated on exposing an  
9 embarrassing secret, not on causing financial ruin (although critical  
10 reputational harm can always result in financial harm).

11        In this case, defendant instilled fear by threatening to expose  
12 a secret about Victim on social media, which defendant said would  
13 "bring [Victim's] house down." The fear leveraged a threat of  
14 reputational harm, which would have impacted both Victim's personal  
15 reputation and his business reputation. The harm to Victim's  
16 business reputation could have certainly resulted in economic harm in  
17 addition to harming Victim's emotional well-being. Such threatened  
18 harm equated to the wrongful use of fear within the meaning of the  
19 Hobbs Act.<sup>4</sup>

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23        <sup>4</sup> In ruling on a pre-trial motion to dismiss an indictment for  
24 failure to state an offense, the district court is bound by the four  
25 corners of the indictment. See United States v. Jensen, 93 F.3d 667,  
26 669 (9th Cir. 1996). However, if the Court would like to consider  
27 proof of the business reputation harm and specific economic harm  
28 anticipated by Victim, the government is prepared to submit an offer  
of proof regarding these details. Such an offer of proof, however,  
should be unnecessary in light of the sufficiency of the Counts and  
case law interpreting extortion and fear. Whether the facts  
ultimately prove such charges is a question for the fact-finder.

1 **IV. CONCLUSION**

2 For the foregoing reasons, the government respectfully requests  
3 that this Court deny the motion and allow the jury to consider  
4 whether the evidence supports Counts Two and Five.